

Serralunga d'Alba

Piedmont, Italy

THESE BAROLOS ARE BUILT FOR THE LONG HAUL.

TOM HYLAND

Site specificity is nowhere more important than in the 11 communes where Nebbiolo vineyards are planted for the production of Barolo. While the wines from La Morra and Verduno are noted for their floral aromatics and round tannins, bottlings from Serralunga d'Alba are generally characterized as powerful and deeply structured, often taking decades to display their finest qualities. "These are probably not the easiest Barolos," admits Franco Massolino, co-wine-maker at his family's firm. "But if you have the opportunity to try these after 20 or 25 years, you find something particular in the wines. This is the business card of Serralunga."

During the 1950s and '60s, when most Barolos were blends of grapes from several communes, producers sought out Serralunga fruit to assure longevity for their wines. Today, with more Barolos emanating from single vineyards, the Serralunga style has become more distinc-

tive, especially in the wines of local estates such as Massolino, Ettore Germano, Fontanafredda, Giovanni Rosso, and Luigi Baudana. This evolution has not gone unnoticed by Piemontese vintners outside the commune—especially Ascheri, Bruno Giacosa, Ceretto, Gaja, Pio Cesare, and Vietti, all of whom produce cru Barolos from Serralunga (note that Angelo Gaja's Sperss, once labeled as Barolo, is now designated simply as Langhe Nebbiolo).

Serralunga is located on the eastern edge of the Barolo Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG). Like its neighbor to the south, Monforte d'Alba, Serralunga takes its surname from the city of Alba, a few miles north of the Barolo production area. Of the 1,150 acres of vines planted in Serralunga, 80% are Nebbiolo, representing 20% of the total Nebbiolo acreage in the DOCG. The vineyards run primarily west to east along a series of dramatic

Aerial view of Serralunga d'Alba (right top); Barolo vineyards (below).



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APPELLATION



Photo by Tom Hyland (top); photo courtesy of Vietti (bottom)

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES



2006 is a classic Serralunga vintage, yielding wines with deep concentration and firm tannins that are built for long aging. 2005 produced Barolos that are, in the opinion of Sergio Germano, "the best balanced of the last decade." Although not as intense as the '06s, the '05s offer beautiful acidity and will drink well for 12-15 years. 2004 wines combine gorgeous aromatics and ideal acidity with notable concentration; these Barolos will be in optimal condition in 25-40 years.

Ascheri Sorano 2006 \$60

A lovely garnet color, with aromas of caraway, dried cherry, and tar. Outstanding balance and typicity are revealed on the palate in sleek acidity, subtle wood, and elegant tannins. Considering its persistence, this wine has 15-20 years of aging potential.

Ascheri Sorano Coste e Bricco 2006 \$70

Youthful garnet in color, offering aromas of cinnamon, orange peel, and currant. This Barolo is medium-bodied and concentrated, with fresh acidity, nicely integrated wood, and tight tannins. Needs a bit of time, but overall is quite elegant. Best in 15-20 years.

Bruno Giacosa Le Rocche del Falletto 2005 \$160

A huge wine with great depth of fruit and typical Serralunga structure. Plenty of spice emerges on the nose and palate, accompanied by young, firm, but nicely integrated tannins. This Giacosa will offer pleasure for at least two more decades.

Cascina Cucco Cerrati Vigna Cucco 2006 \$60

Expressive aromas of caraway and cumin are followed by a medium-full texture with excellent concentration. Noteworthy acidity and structure carry into a lengthy finish. Impressive persistence and beautiful expression of terroir from a consistent and underrated producer. Best in 15-20 years.

Ceretto Prapò 2006 \$88

Complex aromas of caraway, sage, red plum, and cherry pit lead to a medium-bodied, concentrated palate and a big, rich midpalate. The long, elegant finish features silky tannins and beautiful acidity. Best in 15-20 years.

Ettore Germano Ceretta 2006 \$65

A youthful, deep garnet color, with aromas of ripe red cherry, herbal tea, and a hint of marmalade. Medium-full with excellent concentration, the palate displays young, firm tannins and more noticeable oak than the Germano Prapò bottling, with outstanding persistence. Allow plenty of time—best in 15-20 years.

Ettore Germano Lazzarito Riserva 2004 \$90

Tobacco, menthol, dried-cherry, and balsamic aromas emerge on the nose. The palate features excellent concentration and persistence, with paprika and sage appearing on the finish. A gorgeous expression of terroir. Best in 20-25 years.

Ettore Germano Prapò 2006 \$65

This young, garnet-colored Barolo offers beautiful aromas of roses, orange rind, and dried cherry. The medium-bodied,

concentrated palate begins with an elegant entry and finishes long, with firm tannins, lively acidity, and subtle herbal notes. Beautiful finesse and lovely Serralunga style. Best in 15-20 years.

Fontanafredda La Rosa 2006 \$100

This has been one of the most consistent bottlings of Serralunga Barolo since 1998. Appealing aromas of fresh red cherry, red roses, and tar lead to a moderately full palate with lively acidity and excellent concentration and persistence. Beautifully made. Best in 15-20 years.

Giovanni Rosso Ceretta 2006 \$55

Lovely perfumes of red roses, Queen Anne cherry, and strawberry jam jump out of the glass. Medium-full with very good concentration, this Rosso offers sleek acidity, graceful tannins, subtle wood notes, and a lengthy, elegant finish. A bit atypical for Serralunga, it is stylish and approachable on release, but will still be at its best in 15-20 years.

Luigi Baudana Baudana 2006 \$65

Elegant aromas of tobacco, tar, dried cherry, and orange peel lead to a medium-bodied, concentrated texture with excellent grip and persistence. Youthful tannins are backed by acidity and subtle oak notes. Best in 15-20 years.

Luigi Baudana Ceretta 2006 \$65

A nose of cedar, dried cherry, and truffle is followed by a generous midpalate with noticeable, but not excessive, oak. The slightly bitter finish indicates that this wine needs time—best in 15-20 years.

Massolino Margheria 2006 \$85

Sweet-tobacco and red-cherry aromas appear on the nose. The palate features excellent concentration, big tannins, precise acidity, and beautifully integrated oak. Emphasizing the power of Serralunga, this Barolo is structured for 20-25 years of cellaring.

Massolino Vigna Rionda Riserva 2004 \$120

Scents of strawberry jam and tobacco aromas lead to a graceful entry and a palate with outstanding concentration. The lively acidity and elegant tannins are well balanced now, but this wine will be best in 20-25 years.

Pio Cesare Ornato 2006 \$125

Deep aromas of ripe red cherry, vanilla, and orange peel are followed by a concentrated, medium-full palate with lively acidity, ample oak, and youthful tannins. Excellent persistence and plenty of stuffing. Give this Barolo some time—best in 15-20 years, perhaps longer.

Vietti Lazzarito 2006 \$125

Deep garnet in color, showing aromas of ripe red cherry, sage, and a hint of paprika. Medium-bodied with a rich midpalate, this Lazzarito is tightly wound now, but offers impressive concentration and bracing acidity. It's structured for 15-20 years of aging.

Prices are current estimated retail.

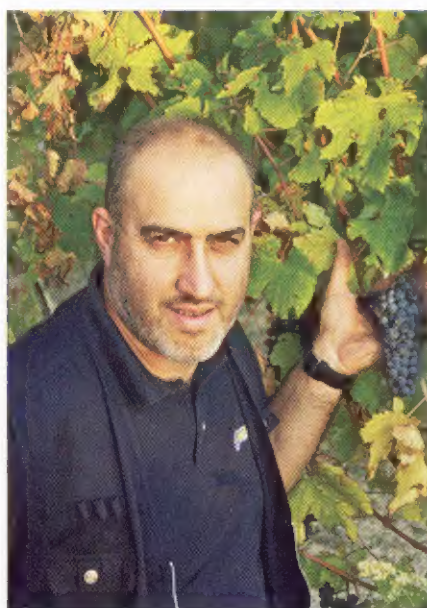
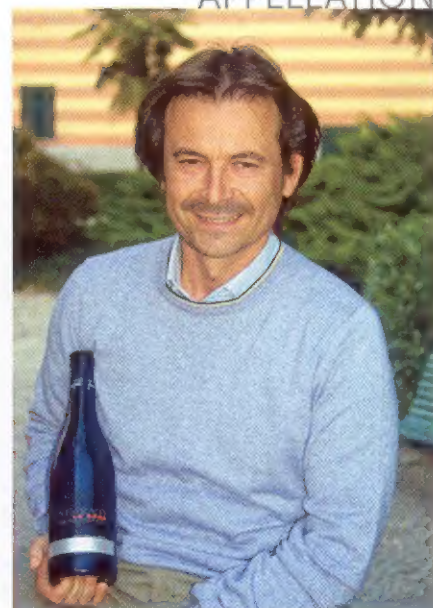


hills, with elevations ranging from 720 to 1,460 feet above sea level.

The commune's largest producer of Barolo, Fontanafredda, lies at its northern end. Winemaker Danilo Drocco, who has been largely responsible for this estate's upswing in quality since he moved over from Prunotto in 1998, describes the zone as being "like a long tongue, with many little valleys inside. Every little valley in Serralunga is a grand cru, a single vineyard with a great potential."

Most local vintners agree that the long-lived Serralunga style is attributable to its soils. The Barolo DOCG is loosely divided between two soil types: the younger Tortonian, found in La Morra, Barolo, and Verduno, and the much older Helvetian, prevalent in Castiglione Falletto, Monforte, and Serralunga. Because these older soils are quite thin, the roots of the vines must go deep for nourishment, ensuring both low yields and firm tannins, which in turn provide the structure needed for the long haul. Massolino characterizes the soil as "very compact, very chalky. It is a *marne*—part limestone and sand together with loose clay." In his view, the middle part of the Serralunga zone, near the town itself, produces the "wine with the greatest potential for aging combined with the greatest elegance."

Matteo Ascheri, who produces two bottlings of Barolo from his family-owned Sorano vineyard in northern Serralunga, makes a distinction between the commune's northern and southern sections. "In the southern part, the wines are really hard, with a lot of tannins, suitable for long aging," he remarks. Vineyards in this area include Falletto (Bruno Giacosa), Ornato (Pio Cesare), and Francia (source of the cel-



Franco Massolino of Massolino (top left); Danilo Drocco of Fontanafredda (top right); Matteo Ascheri of Ascheri (middle left); Davide Rosso of Giovanni Rosso (middle right); Sergio Germano of Ettore Germano (bottom center); Luca Currado of Vietti (bottom right); Ascheri cellar (below).



KEY PRODUCERS

Ascheri

Via G. Piumati, 23
12042 Bra
+39-172-412394
www.ascherivini.it
Importer: Verity
Wine Partners
www.veritywines.com

Bruno Giacosa

Via XX Settembre, 52
12057 Neive
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www.brunogiacosa.it
Importer: Winebow
www.winebow.com

Cascina Cucco

Dei F.lli Stroppiana
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www.cascinacucco.com
Importer: Italia
Wine Imports
www.italiawineimports.com

Ceretto

Loc. San Cassiano, 34
12051 Alba
+39-173-282582
www.ceretto.com
Importer: Wilson
Daniels, Ltd.
www.wilsondaniels.com

Ettore Germano

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www.germanoettore.com

Importer: Oliver
McCrum Wines

www.omwines.com

Fontanafredda

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+39-173-6261111
www.fontanafredda.it

Importer: Domaine
Select Wine Estates
www.domaineselect.com

Gaja

Via Torino, 36/A
12050 Barbaresco
+39-173-635158
Importer: Terlato
Wines International
www.lerlatowines.com

Giacomo Conterno

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+39-173-8221
Importer: Polaner
Selections
www.polanerselections.com

Giovanni Rosso

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www.giovanniroso.com

Importer: Massanois
Imports
massanois.com

Luigi Baudana

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Importer: Vinilandia USA
www.vinilandiausa.com

Massolino

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+39-173-613138
www.massolino.it
Importer: Domaine
Select Wine Estates
www.domaineselect.com

Pio Cesare

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12051 Alba
+39-173-440386
www.piocesare.it
Importer: Maisons
Marques & Domaines
www.mmdusa.net

Vietti

Piazza Vittorio Veneto, 5
12060 Castiglione Falletto
+39-173-62825
www.vietti.com
Importer: Dalla Terra
Winery Direct
www.dallaterra.com

ebated Barolo Monfortino of Giacomo Conterno). "In the northern part," Ascheri continues, "the wines are more elegant and refined, along the lines of Castiglione Falletto."

By using grapes from Sorano, Ascheri can fulfill his goal of crafting wines that "exhibit balance and natural concentration." His Barolo *normale* is aged in *grandi botti* (large casks) of Slavonian oak, 15% new, while the Coste e Bricco bottling, sourced from the finest southern-facing vines (Coste) and those at the top of the hill (Bricco), is aged in 40%-new *botti*. Ascheri finds the Barolo to be "more classical," while the Coste e Bricco is "a bit more modern and can be enjoyed a few years sooner."

Davide Rosso, winemaker at the Giovanni Rosso estate, produces cru Barolos from Ceretta in the north and La Serra in the south—both with soils he describes as "calcareous, mostly white. With this *calcaire* soil," he remarks, "you have the possibility to make a wine that can improve for 30-35 years in the bottle. There is a big mineral character in the wine." Rosso's plot in Ceretta sits at the highest point of the vineyard, at about 1,300 feet, where he finds that the soils are browner than at La Serra (not the same La Serra as the vineyard by the same name in La Morra). As Rosso points out, "The wine from Ceretta is softer in style than La Serra—it's more feminine, with a more floral bouquet. La Serra is stronger, more tannic, and more closed upon release. It takes a long, long time to open—it's really Serralunga style."

Serralunga's most famous Barolo vineyard over the past decade may well be Lazzarito, planted in a striking natural amphitheater on a sheltered hill just north of the town. Several producers, including Ettore Germano, Fontanafredda, and Vietti, make sublime Barolos from their holdings at this site. "I love having this vineyard," proclaims Sergio Germano, winemaker at the estate named for his father. The southwestern ex-

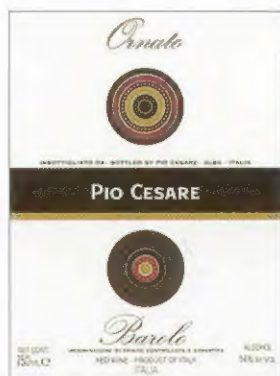
Ascheri's Sorano vineyard.



Luigi Baudana Barolo

Denominazione di Origine
Controllata e Garantita
Imbottigliato all'origine dal vinificatore
Luigi Baudana in Serralunga d'Alba - Italia
Cerretta





posure of his block at Lazzarito produces a wine much different from those of Ceretta and Prapò, where the Germano rows face southeast. "The Lazzarito Barolo is more elegant than the other two, especially in the mouth," he says, "while the finish is quite long with big tannins."

Vietti winemaker Luca Currado believes Lazzarito to be a "superb cru, one that has been known historically since late medieval time. The soil is very compact and rich, while the exposure is fantastic." Currado uses some of these grapes for his less-expensive Castiglione Barolo, but the best fruit—much of it from 43-year-old vines—goes into his Lazzarito bottling.

The muscular style of Fontanafredda's Lazzarito Barolo contrasts with its more feminine and floral La Rosa, due primarily to the elevation: 1,300 feet at Lazzarito, compared to 820 feet at La Rosa. That difference means the grapes at Lazzarito need an extra 10 days on average to reach maturity. "The longer period of maturation gives the grapes a greater concentration of tannin," Drocco notes. The Lazzarito Barolo has been a critical success for Fontanafredda since the late 1990s, but as of 2006 is a part of the winery's Mirafiore line—wines aged traditionally in large oak casks rather than barriques.

In a commune where terroir is sacred, this decision is one that truly defines the soul of Serralunga. As styles of Barolo continue to evolve, the unique wines of Serralunga are bound to become even more recognized for the outstanding qualities they have to offer both the sommelier and the consumer. 🍷



Bruno Giacosa's Falletto vineyard (top); Fontanafredda winery (middle); Pio Cesare's Ornato vineyard (above).